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### Untangling fashion for development

**Citation for published version:**

Lamrad, N & Hanlon, M 2014, 'Untangling fashion for development', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 601-632. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174114X14042383562182>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.2752/175174114X14042383562182](https://doi.org/10.2752/175174114X14042383562182)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture

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## Untangling *Fashion for Development*

### Abstract:

Latin American cultural memories and historical narratives, embodied in traditional symbols, designs and fabrication techniques, have been leveraged by fashion enterprises seeking to address development issues. Through fashion, these enterprises have built a presence within the development space. *Fashion for Development* entrepreneurship models, ranging from one-for-one purchasing to sustainable artisanal workshops present a new approach to target persistent development problems. By providing consumers the ability to directly support frameworks that encourage social change, they are democratizing the capacity to make a difference. This paper questions dominant discourses associated with *Fashion for Development* and attempts to spotlight veiled narratives hidden behind overtly positive narratives and imagery. It employs an interdisciplinary approach to critically analyze and deconstruct online discourse and design adopted by three *Fashion for Development* enterprises: TOMS Shoes, the Faire Collection, and MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE. The article investigates the role of brands and their fashion products as mechanisms for the construction of identities, the perpetuation of discourses of power and privilege, and the deconstruction and deterritorialization of culture and history. The article highlights the need for further research to untangle impacts from the numerous processes and factors associated with *Fashion for Development* on both fashion and development theoretical approaches.

### 5 Key Words:

*Fashion for Development*, Latin America, Material Culture, Ethical Consumption, Agency

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## **Untangling *Fashion for Development***

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Latin American cultural memories and historical narratives, embodied in traditional symbols, designs and fabrication techniques, have been leveraged by fashion enterprises seeking to address development issues through market-driven solutions. The fashion business therefore, has entered the development space through *Fashion for Development*<sup>1</sup> entrepreneurship models that hinge their brand stories on their ethical social and environmental standing. These models range from one-for-one purchasing to microfinance cooperatives to sustainable artisanal workshops. From a business standpoint, *Fashion for Development* social enterprises have successfully presented seemingly responsible forms of consumption that serve to empower consumers as agents for social change.

Consumers as ‘goodwill ambassadors’ meanwhile, purchase *Fashion for Development* products and in the process, they communicate with each other through product signaling, interpreting learned cues as a form “of information prowess” (Donath 2007). Fashion signals may be used to indicate status as well as *affiliation* (Donath 2007). They can be intentional and unintentional, as well as deceptive (Donath 2007). In the context of *Fashion for Development*, a consumer may purchase a product, intending to signal their support for, or financial commitment to a political or social issue such as social justice, or economic empowerment, for instance. This is an example of what Banet-Weijer and Mukherjee (2012:1) refer to as “‘commodity activism’ in the neoliberal moment, a moment in which realms of culture and society once considered ‘outside’ the official economy are harnessed, reshaped, and made legible in economic terms.” That is not to say that commodity activism emerged within the neoliberal moment, “[r]ather, within the evolutionary history of capitalism, consumers have consistently—and often contradictorily—embraced consumption as a platform from which to launch progressive political and cultural projects” (6). By engaging in commodity activism, individuals are linking two competing ideologies--“consumerism (an ideal rooted in individual self-interest) and citizenship (an ideal rooted in collective responsibility to a social and ecological commons)” (Johnston 2007:232). This “hybrid citizen-consumer concept is held together by an ideological tension between consumerism and citizenship—ideologies that are frequently presented as complimentary [*sic.*] and seamless through the ubiquitous message of ‘vote with your dollar’” (233).

This paper does not aim to put forth normative judgments regarding the merits or demerits of commodity activism as embodied in *Fashion for Development* initiatives. The authors agree with Johnston (2007:241) that “a binary approach proves intellectually and politically unsatisfying and suggests the importance of looking to concrete cases [...] to investigate dialectically the possibilities and contradictions of the citizen-consumer hybrid in ethical consumer discourse”. Therefore, rather than simply exalting *Fashion for Development* initiatives, it is crucial to develop an acute awareness of the dynamics of commodity activism that may result in either negative or positive unintentional signals.

These dynamics have not been well investigated. Indeed, referring to fair trade<sup>2</sup>, Adams and Raisborough (2008:1166) note that research on ethical consumption has emerged from fields such as political geography, consumer studies, and business, but the subject, which has "significant cultural and social antecedents", has been understudied by sociologists. Johnston (2007:232) also contends that ethical consumption has been under theorized. This article therefore aims to shed light on the important consequences of these *Fashion for Development* enterprise models and their narratives (both hidden<sup>3</sup> and exposed). The aim is to develop a critical and nuanced understanding of the complexity that surrounds *Fashion for Development*, specifically within the Latin American context.

The implications of *Fashion for Development* business models have yet to be sufficiently grounded within theoretical frameworks related to fashion and development. This article aims to untangle the different forces that influence philanthropic consumption arising from online *Fashion for Development* business models. Specifically, the paper is interested in enterprises that use the internet to market consumer products which utilise the cultural objects of Latin American ethnic groups or nations as fashionable items. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the topic, the article necessarily employs an interdisciplinary approach to critically analyze and deconstruct the online discourses and imagery adopted by various *Fashion for Development* enterprises.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on three cases—TOMS Shoes, the Faire Collection, and MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE—that capitalize on traditional Latin American narratives and fashion systems with the intention of alleviating development challenges within the continent, the article questions the dominant discourse of positive development impact associated with *Fashion for Development*, while also investigating the role of the fashion products themselves as mechanisms for the construction of identities, the perpetuation of discourses of power and privilege, and the deconstruction and deterritorialization of culture and history.

### **Theoretical Approach**

It may be prudent to begin by theoretically contextualizing objects that portray traditional symbols, designs, and fabrication techniques. For example, although cliché, one easily associates the sombrero with Mexico, the guayabera with Cuba and the poncho with a vague conception of a single, mysterious Latin America<sup>5</sup>. Even textiles do not escape being imbued with meanings. Alpaca wool evokes a proximity to an image of 'Latin American' nature, usually snowy mountains, and a romanticized vision of a 'traditional' life, muddled into a composite of snippets of previously consumed images of this imagined *América Latina*. For those who encounter these objects as a reflection of the otherness of Others, the "materiality and physical presence of the object make it a uniquely persuasive witness to the existence of realities outside the compass of an individual's or a community's experience" (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3). Contextualizing dress in this way, it can be

argued that consumers who purchase and wear the items of Others are directly embodying the uniqueness of otherness.

### **Material Culture as a Commodity**

According to Phillips and Steiner (1999:3), cultural objects of Others have been appropriated into two constructed categories—the artifact or a work of art—as defined by two scholarly domains, namely, anthropology and art history. The process of “folding” the cultural objects of Others into the Western art canon as either an artifact or art concealed the realities of commodification as non-Western objects became incorporated into the emerging capitalist economy of the late eighteenth century (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3-4). Indeed, the tendency to classify material culture<sup>6</sup> as a non-commodity sub-class such as ‘objets d’arts’, ‘heirloom’, ‘traditional works’, and ‘authentic piece’, allows the individuals involved in the procurement of such objects to deceive themselves as to their complicity in perpetuating the impact of the commodification of culture.

However, it is important to note that material culture, as with any other thing, is a potential commodity in the right time, space, and cultural context (Appadurai 1986:9; Phillips and Steiner 1999:15). Depending on any number of factors, things can move in and out of a commodity state and this “movement can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant” (Appadurai 1986:13). The exchangeability of things (whether through barter or monetized trade) is situational, meaning that it reflects values derived from both context and from “standards and criteria (symbolic, classificatory, and moral)” (14). Those involved in the process of exchange, may not share the same contextual and criterial associations regarding the object of exchange. This results in what Appadurai (1986:15) termed “regimes of value, which does not imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation, and from commodity to commodity.” Finally, the commodity context—the spaces (physical as well as virtual)—in which exchange occurs links “the social environment of the commodity and its temporal and symbolic state” (15).

Appadurai’s (1986) definition of the “commodity potential” of things provides the flexibility to expand on the temporal, cultural, and social factors that influence, and are influenced by, the process of commoditizing material culture. These factors further allow a study of the regimes of value associated with such commoditization. Here, the same object may simultaneously symbolize manifold meanings. For example, what may be considered a standard, everyday object in one context, when purchased by a tourist at a marketplace, is imbued with different meanings. That is, depending on individual perspective, the object is simultaneously an unremarkable object (within the local space) and a recontextualized exotic curiosity (within the tourist space) that embodies the experiences, knowledge, and

impressions gained during the travel process. Once tourists fulfill the search for the mundane cultural object (which in the tourist space is viewed as rare, unique, authentic and exotic), the object is removed from its cultural context and redefined as what it was imagined to be in the tourist space, which is then translated as a treasured display of power and status. Femenías (2005:113) outlines this process:

Once the tourist purchases her memento, she participates in a new phase of the cycle, resacralizing the souvenir as an untouchable object to be admired. She will remove it once again from the realm of the mundane, tucking it away in the reliquary of a closet, hanging it on the wall as artwork, or donning it as fancy dress for a cocktail party. In the eyes of others, longing for the unreachable artifact enhances its value. The object of desire becomes an emblem of its owner's exclusivity and, at the same time, of her membership in the secular cult of multicultural connoisseurship.

The object is both decontextualized and recontextualized. Decontextualised, because it is removed from its original symbolic state, and recontextualized, yet again, within a new symbolic state as a status emblem of a well-traveled, knowledgeable, and cosmopolitan global citizen.

As Spooner (1986:200-201) has pointed out, commoditized material cultures, such as oriental carpets, are in symbolic flux since they continue to hold meanings (sometimes simultaneously) that change over time and with context. This is what Appadurai (1986:28) refers to as “commoditization by diversion, where value [...] is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts.” This decontextualization imbues objects with new meanings:

In these objects, we see not only the equation of the authentic with the exotic everyday object, but also the aesthetics of diversion. Such diversion is not only an instrument of decommoditization of the object, but also of the (potential) intensification of commoditization by the enhancement of value attendant upon its diversion. This enhancement of value through the diversion of commodities [...] combine the aesthetic impulse, the entrepreneurial link, and the touch of the morally shocking. (28)

### **Material Culture and Signalling**

Displaying material culture as an exotic object increases what Bourdieu called the ‘cultural capital’ of an individual since it signals “an imagined access to a world of difference, often constituted as an enhancement of the new owner’s knowledge, power, or wealth” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3). An individual’s ability to articulate their social position is ingrained in them through a process of socialization where their practices, knowledge, dispositions, and their perceptions reflect their “habitus” (Bourdieu 1979). The term—“habitus”—is used to explain how society is constituted of subjective social structures (Bourdieu 1979:101,

Kabeer 2000:43). Fashion can be used to reinforce these structures, where “[c]lothes are bought and worn according to the meaning we believe them to have, or the messages we believe them to send” (Bernard 2010:23). Kabeer (2000:43) borrows from Bourdieu to investigate how individuals within a community might share a “collective life [...] organized around hierarchies of age, gender and relationship to means of production, hierarchies which embody a conceptual schema which represent the community’s official account of its own social relations, its ideologies about itself”. Kabeer (2000:48) is particularly interested in the implications these social structures might have on individual agency, and exposes opportunity for individualism through “the power of introspection and reflexivity”. With increased agency, consumers can enforce change through “purposive action,” but social change may “simply entail the replacement of one set of restrictive norms and beliefs with another equally restrictive set or it may take the form of divergent interpretations of existing beliefs and values” (48).

In Latin America, clothing both reinforced stratified social structures and identities as well as provided the medium for transcending and blurring these strict boundaries. As individuals exercised “purposive action,” the patterns of dress changed. Indeed, Bauer (2001:104) argues that since “people nearly everywhere were influenced by their neighbor’s new weave; they noticed the dress of people at Mass, and picked through new ribbons or adornments laid out in the innumerable market stalls [...] there is evidence of constant innovation and adaptation as new techniques, new fabrics, new dyes, or new decorative details appear.” Changes could be subtle or obvious, and would take place over time resulting in serious socio-economic ramifications (Bauer 2001:104, 105). In pre-colonial Latin America, clothing would signal “social and religious identity” but this changed with colonization when “dress served as an important visual register in the construction of cultural, racial, and ethnic differences” (Root 2013:398, 397). In Spanish colonial Latin America, “cloth and clothing became a contested cultural terrain” that signaled social class (Bauer 2001:110). Spaniards would dress in clothing woven from luxurious cloth, while Mestizos, for example, are reported to have been “marked by cloth cheaper than that worn by creoles or Spaniards, undoubtedly the product of local obrajes” (111). These signals extended to shoes, which also became a strong marker of social class (Bauer 2001:111, 198; Root 2013: 397). Clothing was used as a tool to signal caste, and though colonial authorities promoted particular styles of dress, “any ‘policy of co-optation’ or excessive borrowing of styles was strongly discouraged” (Root 2013:397). Nonetheless, individuals strove to visually set themselves apart from one another – with the lower castes trying to “dress-up” to climb class hierarchies, and the upper castes pushing to further maintain distinctions (Bauer 2001:111). Root (2013:400) notes that such “[d]isruptive performances of dress may have served as early indicators of a cultural crisis that would bring about the subsequent fragmentation of the Spanish Empire”.



From the standpoint of this paper, consumers harbour multiple identities that are situationally dependent. This conception recognizes that every “consumer is a fragmented and fickle creature, and an ‘ethical identity’ becomes only one of many personas that a consumer can inhabit at a given time within a certain space” (Low and Davenport 2007:342). A consumer makes decisions that may in some cases reflect their ethical sensibilities and in other cases go against these sensibilities. This ethics gap—the gap between consumer declarations and consumer behaviour—is logical once consumer behaviour is re-conceptualized. As Low and Davenport (2007:342-343) explained, “[g]reater accessibility of ethical products, lower prices, more choice and greater consumer information would not necessarily create greater commitment to ethical ideas and close the ethics gap, because, fundamentally, an individual consumer is not always and for all time an ethical consumer.”

Applying the conception of dress as visual signals of both substantive and aspirational identity, consumers engaged with *Fashion for Development* may also be viewed as engaging in ‘disruptive performances,’ as they carve out a new social class, creating a new type of habitus; one founded on the principles of so-called ‘ethical’ consumption practices. Through their choices, consumers have opted to set themselves apart from the mainstream by consuming *Fashion for Development* products that are marketed through a moral economy—an alternative economy calling for consumer engagement “through moral norms and sentiments” (Adams and Raisborough 2008: 1170). While this decision may be based on personal and social norms, or beliefs surrounding justice, it may also be derived from a desire to signal a specific social status (Andorfer and Liebe 2013). Seen through the lens of social status, within the context of fair trade, Andorfer and Liebe (2013:1253) note that ‘ethical selving’ is “not only the expression of ethical consumer identity but can also serve as means of distinction from other members in society.” Here, by purchasing ‘ethical’ products, ‘ethical’ consumers signal membership in a particular social class while distinguishing themselves apart “from other members of society” (Andorfer and Liebe 2013:1254).

The *Fashion for Development* habitus plays two roles in consumer behaviour and choice. Through socialized norms and practices, it is the basis of choices, yet it is simultaneously ‘embodied’ in terms of behaviour—gestures, patterns of speech, patterns of consumption, and so on. Taste plays a role in this since it “functions as a sort of social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place’, guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position” (Bourdieu 1979:466). Taste is further reproduced through “[c]ultural practices which include both knowledge of culture and critical abilities for assessing and appreciating it [...that...] are acquired during childhood in the family and in the educational system” (Crane 2000:7). Focusing on patterns of consumption, Bourdieu’s

conception of habitus overturns the idea of 'luxury' as a special category of objects, focusing instead on the act of purchasing luxury goods as signalling a level of consumption, which reflects the consumer's habitus that includes the embodiment of status, power, knowledge, and wealth. Indeed, Appadurai (1986:38) argues that luxury goods should be defined

as goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs. The necessity to which they respond is fundamentally political [...] it might make more sense to regard luxury as a special 'register' of consumption [...] The signs of this register, in relation to commodities, are some or all of the following attributes: (1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real 'scarcity'; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cuisine, silk in dress, jewels in adornment, and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their 'appropriate' consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person, and personality.

Crane (2000:8) notes that "Bourdieu's theory helps to explain how social classes and hence social structures are maintained over time but it is less applicable in understanding how people respond during periods of rapid social change". Bourdieu's theory also fails to account for rapid growth in technology, and the possible impact of increased access to information on social mobility; "as people's social networks expand and as their social contacts become more varied, they are exposed to and are likely to adopt new forms of culture" (8). According to Crane, "clothing behavior reveals the importance of conceptualizing the cultures of contemporary societies as complex aggregations of codes, sets of clothing items to which social groups have attributed interrelated meanings" (242). While some codes may relay obvious messages, even to members outside the society, others "are understood primarily by those who share the same identities and are opaque to outsiders" (244). They are subtle codes that communicate a sense of belonging to a particular imagined community defined by Anderson (1991:6-7) as "deep, horizontal comradeship" that is "imagined because the members [...] will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" and "limited" because they have clear, albeit elastic, boundaries that separate members from other communities. In the same vein, stratified social groups can be thought of as imagined communities with shared norms and values, and membership exclusivity. Focusing on the construction of identity and the enforcement of membership criteria, Crane (2000:26-27) points out that for Bourdieu, "the consumption of cultural goods associated with the upper and middle classes requires attitudes and knowledge that are not readily accessible to members of the working class."

### **Ramifications of Commoditized Material Culture**

Crane also (2000:248) predicts that “[i]n the increasingly multicultural societies of the twenty-first century, clothing codes will continue to proliferate as a means of expressing relationships within and between social groups and segments and of indicating responses to even more conflicted hegemonies.” This reflects the increasing levels of social complexity resulting, as Spooner (1986:200) argues in his research concerning oriental carpets, in “a need for authenticity, which leads people to cast around for cultural material on which to work out the obsession for distinction.” Authenticity is a multidimensional concept. While there are objective attributes that help define authenticity, subjective interpretations of these objective attributes also impact the perception of authenticity (220). These subjective interpretations are the result of constantly negotiated understandings of cultural values and choices. Speaking for ‘Western’ consumers, Spooner (1986:223) wrote, “[...] we look for authenticity according to *our* cultural concepts, not theirs. Authenticity is our cultural choice [*italics in original*].” In defining authenticity, consumers, through their own cultural lenses, identify points of interest in Other societies, and in the process, they make social statements about themselves and others through the chosen points of interest—they define themselves as well as those who make different choices (225). However, interests change with material and social context forcing consumers to constantly make choices that help to maintain identity continuity (225).

In the process of seeking authenticity, consumers search for ways to express their individualism and “fix points of security and order in an amorphous modern society” (Spooner 1986:226). Due to the multidimensional complexity of our social experience and interaction, and the subsequent loosening of social order, individuality and self-expression become increasingly central to the construction and projection of identity. Material objects play a role in this self-expression:

Authenticity, though stated in terms of objects, bears implications about the person [...since objects...] are used to negotiate not just relative social status, but quality of personality, or how one should be understood and appreciated as an individual by others, and on a scale that has significance only for the individual’s sense of social identity, not for the structure of the society as a whole. (226-227)

For consumers, the search for authenticity resolves the tension between the need for freedom expressed through individuality and the need for security and a sense of belonging to an imagined community.

Consumers seeking authenticity often focus on economically dependent societies reflecting a relationship between cultural appropriation and social dominance (Spooner 1986:228). Authenticity reflects the results of interactions between consumers (dominant) and

producers (dependent) and “becomes more important as the gap grows, partly because as the gap grows we [consumers] appropriate more and more of the symbolic dimension of life in the other society, and inhibit the indigenous symbolization that would generate the authenticity we [consumers] seek” (228). The search for authenticity is, for consumers, an individual dilemma that relies on the arrest of the Other’s natural cultural progression through essentializing modes of dominance such as primitivism and orientalism. The Orient<sup>7</sup>, in contrast to the Occident, was generally homogenized by Euro-centric discourses into “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1978:1). These images, narratives, and discourses serve political purposes, specifically, they reinforce and reproduce unequal power relations between the West and the ‘rest’. For Said (1978:19-20), authority

is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgements it forms, transmits, reproduces.

Orientalism, as a political doctrine, is a mechanism for exercising power and authority (6, 204). Similarly, in romanticizing the otherness displayed through material culture, consumers also rely on homogenizing narratives and discourses to validate false cultural assumptions about the Other, in the process, signalling their dominance over the Other. As discussed above, the consumer’s search for authenticity is an attempt to capture the exoticism and mystery of an ‘unspoiled’ culture. In fashion, exoticism “can refer either to the enticing, fetishized quality of a fashion or style, or to foreign or rare motifs in fashion [...and...] is an effective way of creating a ‘frisson’ (a thrill or quiver) within social conventions of etiquette.” (Craik 1994:17). Analyzing fashion systems, Craik (1994:17) argues they

plunder ‘exotic’ techniques and codes from ‘other’ looks and fashions (including traditional costumes, previous fashion looks, subcultures, and other cultures which are regarded as exotic). In western fashion, the term ‘exotic’ is used to refer to elements of new fashion codes or ‘new looks’ codified as profoundly ‘different’ from previous or contemporary fashion techniques. The ethnographic of western fashion (European or European-derived) ensure that differences between codes of exoticism and mundanity are played up.

Said’s theory may be applied to understand the implications of an “imaginative geography” on the consumer’s perception of Latin America (Said 1985:90). As with the Orient, consumers construct a vision of a Pan-Latin America based on discourses and narratives that imagine a world full of “ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies” (90). In the search for commoditized material culture, consumers choose items that embody these constructed visions as ‘authentic’ representations of the producer’s culture as the Other.

For producers however, the consumer's search for authenticity yields different results. In their interactions with consumers, producers develop ideas about the taste expectations of consumers and adapt their wares to match these expectations: "many forms of aesthetic expression within indigenous communities were profoundly transformed by their makers' intensified involvement in market production" (Phillips and Steiner 1999: 10). This process in effect obstructs the hunt for authenticity yet also fuels the search for truly authentic objects. Another result from these interactions is the alienation of producers from their material culture:

Before, they worked with design embodying symbols that were for them extensions of their own social identities [...] Now, these symbols have become the property of others. To repossess them, they must now find out how they will look to others. (230)

For producers, authenticity results in larger cultural processes where societies are fighting for their survival through the perpetuation of their identity (230). However, with increased dependency comes accelerated alienation from the cultural dimension of their collective social identity embodied in material culture. The consequences of this process include a situation where producers, in the quest for economic development, market the remnants of themselves—"they market their ethnicity, their culture, as a commodity" (230)<sup>8</sup>.

Through the World Wide Web, consumers can "travel" to remote parts of the world, and consume commoditized local culture by, for instance, purchasing fashion material culture. This medium offers effortless escape to other worlds through accessible and interactive curated iconographic cultural displays (Dicks 2003:171). Moreover, the internet has changed how consumers communicate with each other: "[a]s online community formation and other interpersonal interactions become increasingly widespread, the Web's role as a place where people establish their identity becomes more and more important" (Chiou and Donath n.d.:1). Here, the internet can not only be used as a tool to communicate or signal identity—through online spaces such as fashion blogs, for example—but it can also be used as a tool to enhance offline communication or signalling. However, Dicks (2003:192) highlights the consequences of the distancing experienced online on perception since the virtual "replication of the real extends to the appearance and feel of reality, but not its materiality or its resistance to control". Yet, nowadays, consumers can not only virtually trek through cultural displays but also roam exotic marketplaces to hunt for material culture without leaving their home. It has become a space that enables, facilitates, and empowers individuals to consume material culture like never before. In purchasing material culture items, consumers experience a 'return to the natural' which

is viewed more as a frivolous or contrastive enhancement to the modern than as an outright rejection of the fundamental triumph of industry and capitalism. Just as the threatened indigenous inhabitants of the world's rainforests can putatively be saved by watching rock stars' heartfelt music

videos, filmed on whirlwind jaunts through the Amazon, ethnic arts purport to evoke the barbarity of untamed nature without encroaching too deeply on the creature comforts of modernity. (Phillips and Steiner 1999: 27-28)

The question remains whether commoditized material culture packaged as ethical products sold to consumers as part of *Fashion for Development* business models serve to actually make a lasting positive impact on development<sup>9</sup> or whether in fact, they serve to reinforce and legitimize global power inequalities while also disembedding commoditized material culture from its cultural memory and historical narratives<sup>10</sup>. According to Low and Davenport (2007: 338), ethical consumption has shifted away from its politicized origins where complex issues were part and parcel of the activities of citizen-consumers concerned with the politics of market-based relationships. Over the years, the collective citizenship aspect has been dissociated from consumption leading to a situation where “the current incarnation of ethical consumption has given primacy to individual decision-making, and places ethical consumption squarely ‘in the market’ as opposed to ‘within and against the market’ (338).” This approach is appealing to both business and consumers as it does not challenge the market-based hyper consumption logic and instead celebrates it as an effortless and painless solution to very complex problems (336). Using fair trade as an example, Low and Davenport (2007) point to the shift in the message. Fair trade as a global social movement “established a complex set of norms governing the relationship between Southern producers and the Northern organizations that sell to consumers (339).” One of the objectives of the fair trade movement has always been to educate consumers on “the inequitable nature of modern trade relations and agitating for trade reform” however, in the process of mainstreaming fair trade products, “the complexity of the fair-trade message is being lost and made subordinate to the market mantra of quality and taste” (337). Indeed, complex issues such as social justice and environmental conservation implicit in exercising collective consumer choices become cloistered behind a narrowed vision of a de-politicized fair trade as simply the individual decision to pay a ‘fair price’ (339). From this perspective, although the core development message behind the commodification of culture for *Fashion for Development* enterprises is de-politicized, it is in fact inherently political and the “social life of commodities” reflects this politics of power, privilege and social control (Appadurai 1986). Narratives, real or imagined, “invest [...] symbolic value” (Rocamora 2002:350) into the production of fashion. Symbolic value(s) associated with a particular product can vary greatly from product to product. *Fashion for Development* products are constituted of a unique set of signals, or codes, that support symbolic frameworks geared toward notions of poverty alleviation. As Banet-Weijer and Mukherjee (2012:14) put it, “[t]he commodity in question is not only a tangible product [...] but also intangible attributes that include cultural responsibility, moral virtue, political ethics, and social action itself.”

Symbolic frameworks are supported by individuals Bourdieu called “agents of legitimation” (Rocamora 2002:351). Within the context of *Fashion for Development*, in the same way a particular fashion designer or product might conjure up notions of glamour and prestige in the eye of a potential buyer through a symbolic association with a certain celebrity (351), symbolic frameworks for *Fashion for Development* products are seemingly legitimized through narratives that promote development agendas. When the production of a fashion product has signalled *Fashion for Development* values, either through advertising campaigns or product design, potential buyers are expected to believe that the consumption of the product supports the signalled value. According to Prudence Black (2009:503), attempts to make fashion product consumers “feel good about consumption” date back as early as 1982 with Benetton’s ethical tag campaign, shot by Italian photographer Oliviero Toscani. As a result of such campaigns – advertisements promoting ethical consumption narratives – “many of us think if we consume in an ethical way it can make us feel somehow better about ourselves and our place in the world” (Black 2009:503). Indeed, “[c]lothes are bought and worn according to the meaning we believe them to have, or the messages we believe them to send” (Barnard 2010:23). When signals are decoded and placed within social, cultural, political, economic and environmental contexts, symbolic frameworks supporting *Fashion for Development* narratives are drawn into question. Suddenly, *Fashion for Development* products signaling notions that promote poverty alleviation of the Other, for example, may at the same time be supporting symbolic frameworks that signal wealth, power and mystique at the expense of the Other.

### **TOMS, Faire, and MATE**

This article will draw on three cases to critically analyze and deconstruct the online discourse, imagery, and narratives that surround *Fashion for Development* enterprises. There are common threads between TOMS Shoes, the Faire Collection, and MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE. First, all three cases share business models that squarely place the enterprise within the development space, be it through aid, trade, or via a social enterprise framework that is reminiscent of the fair trade model. Second, all three enterprises market and trade their products online, either through their own e-commerce website or through a third party. This flattens the geographic barriers between local, national, regional and global contexts, in the process, eliminating obstacles to experiencing *otherness* and consuming material culture. Through these online platforms, material culture is deterritorialized and recontextualized with new symbolic meanings and narratives. Each *Fashion for Development* case may be viewed as leveraging a pan-Latin American imagined identity in efforts to support development initiatives. These endeavours paint an incredibly diverse geographic region with the same brush, essentializing distinct cultures.

The three cases target different market segments. MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE is geared toward the luxury market with price points that reflect this target consumer segment. In buying these products through NET-A-PORTER.COM, consumers are purchasing exclusivity. TOMS shoes provide cost-effective access to philanthropic consumption for the middle-class consumer which contributes to the brand's ubiquity. The Faire Collection targets a slightly different consumer—one that readily engages in 'disruptive performances'. The target customer may not be as affluent as the MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE customer but attempts to signal belonging to the upper caste of the fashion hierarchy by purchasing markers of luxury, sophistication and exclusivity.

### **TOMS Shoes**

TOMS shoes is a company built on a now trademarked "One for One" philosophy: when a customer purchases a pair of TOMS shoes, the company donates a second pair of TOMS shoes to a child in one of over fifty countries through partnerships with over seventy-five international organizations (TOMS 2013a). To date, the company claims to have gifted over ten-million pairs of shoes to children across the world (TOMS 2013a). In 2011, the company expanded into eyewear using the same business model (TOMS 2013a). This article will focus only on TOMS shoes. TOMS shoes partner organizations are said to focus on increasing health, education and confidence amongst the youth in target countries (TOMS 2013d). While the majority of the shoes donated by the company are black canvas, shoes sent to Argentina are designed "in a variety of colors and patterns to keep with the local tradition" (TOMS 2013c). The company defines itself not as a business, but as a *movement*, organizing movement events with educational programming designed to promote "conscious consumerism and social entrepreneurship" (TOMS 2013a), and running movement awareness campaigns such as One Day Without Shoes and World Sight Day (TOMS 2013a). Community members are even invited to join the company on a "Giving Trip" as a volunteer to distribute shoes (TOMS 2013a). Giving, after all, is highlighted as the company's founding principle: "Giving is what fuels us. Giving is our future. It's the core of our business" (TOMS 2013e).

### **The Faire Collection**

Established in 2008, the social enterprise, the Andean Collection "transcended its Andean roots" and rebranded as the Faire Collection in July, 2013 (Faire Collection 2013a). Through their website, consumers learn the story of the Faire Collection which works with over 225 artisan partners based in Peru and Ecuador as well as Vietnam and Swaziland. The consumer is repeatedly reminded of the brand's foundations in the Founder's Master's research into poverty reduction strategies in rural South America. From her fieldwork, Amanda Judge concluded that jewellery making was the path to sustainable economic development for rural communities in Ecuador. Accessories made of natural materials such as seeds, bullhorn, coconut, and alpaca are the company's core products. Based in



Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York, the Faire Collection's design team collaborates with local artisans to help "create inspired designs that allow the artisans to earn a fair wage and make a better life for themselves" (Faire Collection 2013b). It is important to point out that the Faire Collection refers to their producers as 'artisans' and to their producers' workspaces as 'workshops'. For consumers, the website provides an interface with the (curated) reality of the artisans working with the Faire Collection. It is possible to watch a video tour of artisan workshops, learn more about their lives, the (always positive) impact of their collaboration with the Faire Collection, and even a timeline outlining their partnership with the social enterprise. The consumer is encouraged to believe that through their purchases they become intimately connected to the artisans, often referred to by their first names—Jose Luis and Mercedes; Christian and Viviana; Fernanda and Carlos. Using narratives, videos, and photographs to build a connection between the consumer and the artisan, the Faire Collection mediates this relationship as it is filtered through the brand story inherent in the website's marketing message.

### **Mario Testino for MATE**

MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE is a collection of jewelry, handbags and kaftans designed by internationally renowned Peruvian fashion photographer Mario Testino, exclusively for sale through the NET-A-PORTER.COM marketplace (NET-A-PORTER.COM 2013). The MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection was "[i]nspired by the vibrant costumes and artisan craftwork captured" (NET-A-PORTER.COM 2013) in Testino's ALTA MODA photo exhibit, which depicts "Peruvians wearing traditional and festive attire" (MATE 2013), and was featured on the cover of the April 2013 issue of Vogue Paris. To complement the traditional dress featured within the exhibit, Testino reconstructed colorized photographic backdrops from the work of Peruvian "Indigenist photographer" Martin Chambi (Martin Chambi 2013). Chambi was known for his ability "to photograph his people as seen through their own eyes" (Martin Chambi 2013).

## **Analysis**

### **Narratives of Origin**

All three cases, TOMS, the Faire Collection, and MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE, were founded by individuals on seemingly messianic missions, striving to make a difference in this world by having a positive impact on the people and places they hold near and dear. While the stories themselves may vary, each maintains overtly positive narratives of origin. Through brand marketing techniques, these narrative become intrinsically linked to the products being sold. When consumers purchase a pair of shoes from TOMS, a necklace from the Faire Collection, or a MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE kaftan, they are not just buying a product, they are investing in a cause--or so they are told.

Brand narratives of origin paint the Founders with a patina of virtue and righteousness. For TOMS shoes, which stands for “Shoes for a Better Tomorrow,” began when Blake Mycoskie, “befriended children in a village in Argentina” in 2006 “and found they had no shoes to protect their feet” (TOMS 2013a, TOMS 2013e). He is featured in company literature as the leader of a ‘movement’ as ‘Chief Shoe Giver’ (TOMS 2013b). He is regularly featured in company marketing materials, often bending down and placing the shoes directly onto the nude feet of the children receiving the donation (TOMS 2013a, TOMSb). For the Faire Collection, the Founder and CEO, Amanda Judge, is described as “fascinated by development in South America” (Faire Collection 2013c). She has forgone the pursuit of worldly pleasures in the interest of more virtuous objectives since she “gave up a steady salary in the financial services industry to work in some of the most desolate areas of Central and South America on poverty reduction projects” (Faire Collection 2013c). As for MATE, promotion materials emphasize Mario Testino’s unflinching devotion to Peruvian culture. MATE, Asociación Mario Testino, was itself founded in 2012 in Lima, as a “manifestation of his [Mario Testino’s] personal desire to contribute to the cultural heritage of Peru” (Mario Testino 2013). MATE was designed to serve as “a dynamic platform to celebrate Peruvian artists both locally and internationally as well as permanently showing the work of Mario Testino” (Mario Testino 2013a). The MATE Mission Statement has four main goals geared toward supporting Peru by promoting Peruvian artists, culture, heritage, and tourism (Mario Testino 2013). MATE is not the first time Testino has shown commitment to a philanthropic cause. The photographer is known in the fashion community for being “[e]ngaged in numerous humanitarian causes” (Vogue Paris 2013b, MATE 2013). In 2008, for example, he partnered with Save the Children Peru to rebuild a hospital, a project funded exclusively “from the sale of a single print from Mario Testino’s iconic portraits of the late Princess Diana” (Mario Testino 2013). The MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection supports Testino’s vision for Peru through partial proceeds from each purchase donated to MATE (NET-A-PORTER.COM 2013).

All three companies use brand messaging to position themselves outside conventional mass fashion consumption systems; marketing schemes drive home narratives of origin and showcase products as an alternative to the mainstream. The brands chart an alternative path for enlightened consumers to opt out of the conventional fashion system. While a TOMS purchase, for example, is branded to equate a direct contribution to a trusted international development scheme, the rebranded Faire Collection hinges on the homonym Faire which reflects the fair trade aspect of the company as well as the French verb meaning to make. Both angles are highlighted as core brand values. The internet can play a powerful role both in outlining this alternate path as well as in community building. The social media presence of each company drives home the idea of an alternative, more sensuous, and therefore more authentic lifestyle; one that is closer, and more connected to nature and people, and therefore, more fulfilling. For instance, Judge is a regular

contributor to the Faire Collection blog, which provides (curated) access into her everyday life (her lush rooftop garden in New York, her favorite vegetarian recipes from Ecuador), her journeys of discovery (travelogues from Hanoi, Quito, Lake Yahuarcocha), and even her global trekking knowledge outlined in “insider” travel tips posts. With consumer engagement through interactive websites, as well as through a suite of social media platforms, the internet becomes a gateway into the *Fashion for Development* habitus. When consumers interface with this online presence, they experiment with their participation in this habitus. Seemingly, with a purchase, consumers pay the membership fee to be inducted into the imagined community.

### **Agential Discourse**

In terms of development discourse, the idea of ‘empowerment’ is quite prevalent in all three cases. Each brand focuses on the idea of empowering those in need to lift themselves out of poverty. This discourse ignores the other side of the equation, specifically, the individuals providing access to this power. The Founders of each brand assume a vanguard role and the primary leadership responsibility for this task. The press release announcing the rebranding of the Andean Collection to the Faire Collection, for instance, specifically credits the CEO and Founder Amanda Judge with *giving* “over 225 artisans access to the global market” (Faire Collection 2013g). The passivity of the artisans in this discourse is obscured. Overtly, Judge *gives*, yet, the narrative fails to spotlight the fact that the artisans *receive*. Instead, the artisans ‘collaborate’, and ‘lift themselves out of poverty’. TOMS is also known to collaborate with artists, designers, and even celebrities, such as the company’s 2011 partnership with Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen (Bergin 2011). The company further partners with artists from developing countries such as TOMS Haiti Artist Collective, which is designed not only to support local jobs, but also to help Haitian artisans gain access to the global market, “giving artists a global canvas to bring the beauty and richness of Haitian culture to people worldwide” (TOMS 2013g). Yet again, it is the brand that *gives* artists a ‘global canvas’ in the form of TOMS shoes.

On a parallel level, brand messaging squarely places the responsibility of empowerment onto the shoulders of consumers who, through their purchase, are told they empower the dependent Other (artisans, or children, or indigenous Peruvians) to lift themselves out of poverty. The rationale for this responsibility is closely related to that of colonial rule where the “desired outcomes of the ‘civilizing’ of indigenous peoples would be their own increased ‘industriousness’, as evidenced by their more efficient production of ‘manufactures’, together with the transformation of these populations into consumers of Western manufactured goods” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:10).

Agents of legitimation play an important role in securing an exclusive community. For TOMS, celebrities showcased in fashion magazines wearing the shoes act as agents of

legitimation for the product's style credentials (Cook, 2010). Images of celebrities legitimize the status of the product, securing its relevance within the culture of popular fashion while supporting the *Fashion for Development* narrative—wearers of TOMS shoes might see themselves as more than ambassadors for poverty alleviation, as they have become members of an elite group, and joined the ranks of celebrities to promote the symbolic production of *Fashion for Development* narratives. The Faire Collection provides consumers with easy access to the images of celebrity approval through the website's Celebrity Sightings page featuring the likes of Brooke Shields, Maya Rudolph and Elisha Cuthbert. With these choices, the brand runs the gambit from the 'sophisticated woman' to the 'funny comedienne' to the 'sexy, young woman' showing that these products are for 'every' woman even non-celebrities. Meanwhile, MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE relies on Mario Testino's celebrity status within the fashion community to legitimate the brand's status which is further heightened by the support of Vogue magazine, often considered a fashion bible for the upper crust of the fashion industry (Kopnina 2007:368).

The internet appears to empowers consumer agency, challenging Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus in two important ways. First, it has opened a floodgate where access to information is concerned. Further, e-commerce<sup>11</sup> has eliminated the burden of travel, when seeking international fashion products. With no travel expenses or costly middle man brokerage fees, products that may have previously been unattainable for middle-class consumers are easily accessible, and from the comfort of their home, no less; within the context of fair trade, Low and Davenport (2007: 340) note a perceived effortlessness to poverty reduction when "[c]onsumers can shop for a better world from the comfort of their armchairs through the convenience of the Internet, without having to engage with time-consuming campaigns - social transformation can be easy, clean and fun!" Within the context of fashion, this blurring of lines is presented as evidence to support the supposed democratization of fashion, where it is expected that the systems result in "an eventual standardization of clothing in which social class differences would be less visible or nonexistent" (Crane 2000:62). But the online marketplace has not disabled systems of stratification. As seen through the MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection for example, NET-A-PORTER.COM is an exclusive boutique selling limited-edition pieces from high-end fashion designers at luxury price points. While middle-class consumers may enjoy virtual window-shopping, the price points of many of the products featured in the online store will likely keep them from placing an order. Even if the middle-class consumer splurges on a certain piece, the item would likely be selected to complement a majority middle-class wardrobe of "inelegant tastes" (Crane 2000:39). Thus, "[d]emocratization of clothing has led to diversity, not standardization" (240).

Ironically, however, this commoditization of material culture has, in some ways, 'standardized' ethnic aesthetic expression. For instance, through their features of different

workshops, the Faire Collection alludes to the production of distinct cultural expressions-- Amazonian Kichwa communities excel at creating jewellery from natural materials, while Peruvian artisans excel at knitting and weaving alpaca (Faire Collection 2013d; 2013e). However, the Faire Collection is still guiding the design process in a direction that matches the brand aesthetic, which is described as “trend-setting designs that reflect both the culture heritage of the country of origin, as well as the style influences of New York City” (Faire Collection 2013f). In the end, the brand aesthetic is the standard present in all the designs resulting in a common ‘feel’ to products regardless of the country of production whether it is based in Latin American or South East Asia. As Craik (1994:36) has argued, “the western fashion system poaches from other systems and cannibalises diverse influences in reconstituting new techniques of dress and decoration”.

### **Framed Authenticity**

Authenticity is a poison pill in the *Fashion for Development* discourse. On the one hand, authenticity is a reflection of a nostalgia for ‘simplicity’ reflected in hand-made products with iconographic motifs and symbols, and fabrication techniques that signal a pre-industrial way of life, in essence, a rejection of modernity (Phillips and Steiner 1999:12-13). On the other hand, in purchasing these items, consumers are participating in perpetuating the idea that producers, through their ‘authentic’ products, will achieve an unarticulated, amorphous ‘development’. Phillips and Steiner (1999:12) point to the hypocrisy of this rationale where equating authenticity with the preindustrial characteristics of a product in fact disavows producers from a modern (read: industrial or post-industrial) world.

Despite these points, authenticity and inauthenticity are not binary labels. Thinking of the authenticity-inauthenticity divide as a spectrum of possibilities, authenticity may be perceived through design, material or fabrication techniques, for example. In the case of TOMS shoes, design can be used to signal authenticity as seen through the Haiti Artist Collective line, an initiative which “creates and supports local jobs, while giving artists a global canvas to bring the beauty and richness of Haitian culture to people worldwide” (TOMS 2013g). Through this collection, the company claims to be “creating jobs with cultural expression” (TOMS 2013g). The collective is a group of Haitian artists who add an overlay of ethnic expression to TOMS shoes by hand painting the fabric with their designs—a TOMSxHaitian artists collection, so to speak. Similar to the Faire Collection, TOMS invites consumers to “meet the collective” through an online gallery of portraits and biographical details (TOMS 2013g).

Meanwhile, at the Faire Collection, perpetuating a sense of authenticity is at the heart of the brand’s genesis and success. According to the company, jewellery making as a path to development was a natural conclusion. After all, “[n]ot only did Ecuador have a long, rich

history of handcrafting jewelry out of rainforest seeds, but there was also a global demand for well-made, one of-a-kind pieces” (Faire Collection 2013a). This statement is a veritable checklist for those searching for qualities that signal authenticity: handcrafting, a long and rich history highlighting the authentic credentials of the product as a totem of the otherness of Ecuadorians; a ‘return to the natural’ figuratively through the imagined rural existence of these ‘artisans’, and literally through the use of natural materials; and the uniqueness of the object. However, the designs are not ‘authentic’ per se, instead, the company highlights the authenticity of fabrication techniques and materials, especially focusing on the handmade production aspect of the artisanal creative process. This element is so central to the myth of the Faire Collection, that in the artisan bios section of the Peru workshop, the narrative adopted an apologetic tone when describing Faustino’s process which relies on artisanal machines to increase production capacity, thereby allowing him to match the demand for his products. The consumer is reassured that these machines are manually operated and used specifically to organize complicated patterns. The narrative emphatically repeats that: “[n]o electricity is used” (Faire Collection 2013e). In fact, consumers are informed that Faustino often sends his pieces to another artisan for hand finishing, Lidia, who “thinks it is important to share her Peruvian culture with the world” (Faire Collection 2013e). Note that this discourse reduces Lidia’s culture to handmade knit alpaca and wool products sold through the website.

Successful development is contingent on the consumer’s perception of an imagined primitiveness projected onto an essentialized Pan-Latin American artisan. However, for these artisans to expand their supply, and achieve economies of scale they must move away from the hand-made and mechanize their production as Faustino attempted in the Peruvian workshop. Therein lies the paradox. If they mechanize their production, the allure of authenticity is lost and accusations of inauthenticity would abound as their products acquire labels such as ‘replica’ or worse yet, tourist kitsch. The items purchased by consumers are, in a way, synecdoche for material culture. For example, in the description of the Faire Collection’s Amazon workshop, the website emphasizes the “revival of ancestral artisanal techniques”:

Creating jewelry from the land is a cultural practice for the indigenous Kichwa communities in the Amazon region, which is deeply rooted in people’s respect and appreciation for their ancestral heritage. For the artisans their craft is a gift from their ancestors that they cherish. (Faire Collection 2013d)

The idea of the complexity of material culture is evoked using words such as “deeply rooted,” “heritage” and “cultural practice.” However, as the Kichwa’s artisanal techniques are being commoditized, the cultural objects lose their complexity. Consumers are informed that there is a long historical tradition although it is not expounded upon with details of the meanings of this type of jewellery, the symbolic structures that it helps signal,

the origins of these fabrication techniques and so on. In lieu of complexity, consumers accept the simplicity of the story. After all, “the lure of ‘ethnic’ commodities, seems to hinge on an aura of a ‘simpler’ way of life, utopian visions of peasant life, and nostalgia for the perceived luxury of the handmade” (Maynard 2004:75).

Analysis of the MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection also unpacks the concept of authenticity. The collection features cotton-blend jersey T-shirts, and cotton and silk-blend twill kaftans with prints of close-ups of photographic images taken from Testino’s ALTA MODA exhibit (NET-A-PORTER.COM). Testino’s photographs gained value from the cultural memories associated with iconographic representations, indigenous symbolization, and meanings derived from the traditional fabrication techniques conveyed through his exhibit. Note that the individuals wearing the clothing in Testino’s images are hidden, seemingly denied agency, as they are engulfed by the spectacle of traditional material culture in the form of woven textiles and layered aesthetic expressions of identity. These objects derive their value from the process of fabrication, which adds social and cultural meaning to cloth. However, in the MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection, traditional fabrication techniques are projected and displayed on T-shirts and kaftans with such clear fabrication details that the weave and embroidery work seem virtually present. Adding to the illusion is the way in which the images are positioned on the T-shirts and kaftans. Each printed fabrication is placed to appear as if the traditional dress was really being worn. As a result, in wearing the garment, the consumer virtually embodies the “real” and “authentic” indigenous Peruvian dress. Authenticity is thus drawn into question, as the images are merely a simulation of both fabrication and dress.

### **Voyages and Travel Discourses**

Through travel discourse, TOMS is presented as a global brand. As one campaign slogan reads: “Our giving is taking us to never before seen places” (TOMS 2013h). Argentina plays the leading role in the TOMS narrative—not only did the country spur Mycoskie to build his movement, the Argentine alpargata inspired the design of the brand’s “Classic” shoe (TOMS 2013h). In fact, Mycoskie claims that all of South America seems to have played a role in motivating him to create the company: “I was so overwhelmed by the spirit of the South American people, especially those who had so little, and I was instantly struck with the desire—the responsibility—to do more” (TOMS 2013a).

The Faire Collection also accentuates travel discourses in their communication with consumers. Evoking the idea of a voyage, the website’s About Us section begins with a narrative that describes the brand’s “journey” (Faire Collection 2013a). The Founder and CEO is described as a “true globetrotter” who has “visited and lived in more than 25 countries” (Faire Collection 2013b). Furthermore, she “will be continuously traveling to all corners of the world on a never-ending quest to find more things that you will love” (Faire

Collection 2013b). The locales where the artisans are living, and to which Amanda Judge has traveled, are described as “raw and remote environments” (Faire Collection 2013b). This messaging helps consumers construct and maintain an Orientalist representation of the producer’s geographic environment which further allows them to ride the “off the beaten path” message that takes them (virtually and through their purchases) to unique, untouched, and therefore authentic parts of the world. Of course, the discourse ignores the fact that people with living cultures have existed in these regions for centuries and still continue to live their everyday lives there today.

The images in the Vogue issue featuring Testino’s work and collection were a departure from the ALTA MODA exhibit. The images signal a gendered vision of a feminized indigenous Peru, inviting the viewer to visually consume and control an embodied *otherness*. The cover image, “Traditional women’s dress. Province of Espinar, Cusco, Peru 2007,” of the ALTA MODA exhibit, for example, featured a model wearing traditional dress, facing away from the camera. The woman’s arms are positioned on either side of her body, as she holds up her skirt exposing her ankles and the backs of her feet (MATE 2013). Conversely, the cover image for Vogue magazine features a model wearing a traditional inspired, yet contemporary, outfit. Here, the model faces toward the camera, arms on hips, engaging the viewer with direct eye contact. The Vogue model is styled for a contemporary audience, revealing much more than just the skin below her ankles (Vogue Paris 2013a). Moreover, while Testino’s photo exhibit used Chambi inspired backdrops to capture the essence of Peru, its traditions, and its people, the Vogue images use Cuzco, the Peruvian coast and the Nazca desert as backdrops – all popular tourist destinations (Vogue Paris April 2013). The Vogue image transforms the “traditional” and “elevates” it into the modern “exotic” with text that reads “escale au Perou” and “Les elés du paradis” (Vogue Paris 2013a). It reinforces the viewer’s Orientalist imaginings that a stopover in Peru would result in romance, exoticism, “haunting memories and landscapes” (Said 1978:1), and sensual and sensuous experiences. This imagery and associated discourse signals a departure from the photographs featured in Testino’s exhibit, but stays true to Testino’s vision for MATE, in promoting Peruvian tourism.

### **Future Implications: A call for further research**

This article draws attention to the contradictions that emerge from a critical examination of philanthropic consumption, specifically the consumption of material culture marketed as *Fashion for Development*. A decoding of online *Fashion for Development* narratives through critical theoretical frameworks has revealed hidden narratives of power and control that are perpetuated in the long-term despite the inherently conspicuous narratives of ‘doing good’ resulting in short-term positive change and development. Since the positive impact of these initiatives has been well-documented<sup>6</sup>, the authors chose to concentrate on the



hidden narratives that also inhere in the consumption of *Fashion for Development* products. This article therefore reveals that further research is required to better understand the implications, both positive and negative, such narratives might have on the agents at the heart of each story. Indeed, Banet-Weijer and Mukherjee (2012:2) highlight the need to investigate commoditized forms of social action, which includes *Fashion for Development* initiatives, arguing that “commodity activism [...] offers critical insights into both the promise and the perils of consumer-based modes of resistance as they take shape within the dynamics of neoliberal power.”

While concepts like consumption and e-commerce are themselves culturally constructed from within various Latin American countries and merit further study, this article suggests that consumer agency is on the rise, albeit asymmetrically. With increased access to information and material cultures through the World Wide Web, consumers are seemingly empowered to seek out fashion products from alternative sources, carving out their own unique habitus, and in the process, satisfying their craving for authenticity. While *Fashion for Development* narratives have responded to consumer needs for increased agency, there is a disconnect in understanding how these initiatives impact individual producers as well as the producer’s collective socio-cultural survival and evolution. *Fashion for Development* marketing strategies tell overtly positive tales to assure consumers that they have endorsed the right cause. What’s more, by displaying these material cultures, consumers are broadcasting their sense of belonging in an imagined global community of enlightened, righteous, and virtuous multicultural connoisseurs.

It is still unclear, however, what implications fashion technology will have on *Fashion for Development* initiatives. Fashion is a driving force behind the commercialization of what has become known as “intelligent clothing” (Gupta 2009:1916). Reflecting the authenticity discourse, Gupta (2009:1915) sees “aesthetic personalization” as a top priority for future industry streams of tech-savvy clothing applications, categorized under “leisure”. MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE used fashion technology in the form of photographic imagery to project traditional fabrications onto fabric, virtually eliminating the traditional “ethnic” producer from the equation. Thus, while it would appear that consumers purchasing these items have purchased a traditional Peruvian design, the real authenticity lays with the image or design produced by Mario Testino. Here we note that Mario Testino himself is authentically Peruvian, revisiting and re-envisioning his country’s material cultural heritage. In his attempt to address development issues in Peru, Testino draws on cultural memories embodied in traditional symbols, designs, and fabrication techniques that go through multiple permutations of meaning and symbolism as they are repeatedly decontextualized and redefined. The greater the gap between the indigenous communities that produce these material cultures, and the consumers who purchase the MARIO TESTINO FOR MATE collection through NET-A-PORTER.COM, the greater the loss of

cultural memory and historical narratives embodied in the material culture. Although Testino's goals may be genuine, the theory suggests that the process through which he is protecting and promoting Peruvian indigenous culture may, in fact, be further marginalizing and disembedding it from indigenous communities in the long-term.

As previously articulated, technology has played a key role in facilitating the *Fashion for Development* agenda. Armchair tourists are transformed into philanthropic consumers sold the narrative that they too can change the world by adding an item to their virtual shopping cart and completing the transaction. Playing up homogenizing discourses of primitiveness and authenticity, this approach simplifies the solutions to very complex problems into effortless, thoughtless transactions. There is a need to further investigate the implications of the privatization of development issues through overarching discourses that link poverty alleviation to a capitalist activity while ignoring or obscuring the complex interplay between numerous factors, including the role of the global market paradigm, in perpetuating the negative conditions prevalent in producer countries.

An investigation into *Fashion for Development* consumption and business models has uncovered two very different narratives. It has highlighted the Janus-faced nature of these forms of consumption and business models. Contrary to common belief, although these companies may be 'doing well by doing good' they may in fact also be doing well by unintentionally doing 'bad'. Furthermore, since the potential negative impact of these enterprises is not as easily manifested as the positive impact it is simply unperceived pointing to a pressing need for further research into the long-term implications of *Fashion for Development* particularly when it comes to the construction of notions of socio-cultural and historical identities, both real and imagined.

### Notes

1. The term *Fashion for Development* used within the context of this article is not a reference to the UN's program also entitled Fashion 4 Development. *Fashion for Development* is being used as a general description of fashion brands that have taken an active role in finding solutions for development-related issues.
2. For details on the historical trajectory of fair trade and the debates surrounding fair trade from a development studies perspective see Fisher (2009).
3. In this context, 'hidden' does not imply an intentional level of deception. Instead, these hidden narratives reflect unperceived and unexpected consequences.

4. Discourse was chosen as a window through which to investigate the impact of *Fashion for Development* because, as Johnston (2007:233) notes, “discourse structures the space in which agency and subjects are constituted.” Furthermore, the critical approach “is not simply interested in how social reality is discursively constructed, but has a particular focus on how discursive activities create, sustain, and legitimate relationships of power and privilege” (233). Please note that the authors have not interviewed companies or consumers and are therefore calling for further analysis to explore corporate and consumer intentions and motivations within the context of *Fashion for Development* frameworks and agendas.

5. The authors recognize that the concept of Latin America was (and still is) constructed through ahistorical colonial narratives that obscure and diminish the diverse cultural experiences and realities of the region and the people. For more on the history of the process of the construction of the concept of Latin America see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

6. Diana Crane and Laura Bovone (2006) discuss fashion as material culture in their paper "Approaches to material culture: The sociology of fashion and clothing," *Poetics* 34:6, 319-333.

7. The authors understand this word through Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). Although Said specifically addressed the Orient in this work, Orientalism as a concept can be used to unpack cultural generalizations that understand non-Western cultures through Western frameworks in other parts of the world. This paper is concerned with Orientalism with regards to Western generalized interpretations of a deterritorialized ‘Latin America’ (see note 5 on the conception of Latin America) constructed through Western systems of representation and frameworks of understanding. For more see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

8. For a detailed case study of the contradictory impact of the integration of cultural objects into the global capitalist market on producer artisans see Rosenbaum and Goldin (1997).

9. For a guide focused on fair trade initiatives see Littrell and Dickson (1999).

10. See Adams and Raisborough (2008:1172) for details on how the fair trade movement has utilized imagery of a “fantasy ‘other’” to drive consumer reflexivity.

11. Although e-commerce appears to improve access to consumer products at face value, it is important to note that a variety of state-specific policies may impede this access through different means such as taxation regimes and customs fees. On this point, the authors

suggest that further research is needed regarding the impact of certain contexts on the accessibility to markets and commerce networks (including shipping networks), and therefore on consumer agency and the democratization of fashion.

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